

Featured Essays

4) What Are We Teaching When We Teach Engagement?

Elizabeth A. Bennion, Associate Professor and Campus Director of the American Democracy Project, Indiana University South Bend, ebennion@iusb.edu

Hannah M. Dill, Senior Political Science Major, Indiana University South Bend.

The American Political Science Association includes a Civic Engagement Task Force, hosts regular Teaching & Learning Conference tracks on civic engagement, and published a monograph entitled *Teaching Civic Engagement: From Student to Active Citizen* in February 2013. What do political scientists teach when they teach engagement? What learning outcomes to they promote and study in connection to their teaching and research? We conducted a comprehensive analysis of recently published articles in discipline-specific SoTL journals, “The Teacher” section of *PS: Political Science & Politics* and *The Journal of Political Science Education*, to answer these questions.

A total of 246 articles have been published in “The Teacher” since 2000, with 22 articles (8.9%) focused on civic engagement. These articles, reflecting the work of 33 teacher-scholars, include a discussion of service learning (15 articles), civic engagement (13 articles), political engagement (5 articles), and civic skills (1 article).

The Journal of Political Science Education (JPSE) was first published in 2005. Of the 161 articles published in Volumes 1-8, approximately one-quarter (28 articles, 23%) are focused on civic engagement. As in “The Teacher” section of *PS: Political Science & Politics*, articles in the *JPSE* report on service learning (24 articles), civic engagement (25 articles), political engagement (17 articles), and civic skills (4 article). Several articles in the *JPSE* also highlight the development of specific political skills, such as coalition building, engaging in evidence-based political discourse, and developing a strategic plan for political action (5 articles).

We are pleased to see that political scientists are publishing work that explicitly promotes and measures students’ political engagement and the skills required to engage in our political system. The fact that only 27 of the 407 articles we reviewed – or less than seven percent--explicitly study *political* engagement concerns us given that we focused exclusively on scholarship published in political science journals. Civic engagement is promoted across the curriculum, but political knowledge and skills are commonly the domain the political science departments. We urge political science faculty to develop courses that teach the attitudes, knowledge, and skills required for political engagement – and to publish the results of SoTL projects designed to test the learning outcomes of such efforts. Democracy is not a spectator sports. Let’s give our students the skills they need to play – and play well.